

Mixed Methods Evaluation of Phase 2 and the Expansion of Mana in Mahi

Summary of findings

Mana in Mahi

Mana in Mahi aims to support people at risk of long-term benefit receipt, who need additional support into sustainable work while gaining an apprenticeship or formal industry qualification.

People who are employed through Mana in Mahi can receive incentive payments, funding to help with costs of studying, pastoral support, including mentoring and counselling.

For employers, Mana in Mahi offers a wage subsidy, support towards industry training fees (if necessary), coaching services and support with pre-employment or on-the-job training. Employers must commit to supporting participants through a formal industry training qualification and provide them with sustainable on-going work.

Following an initial pilot phase, Phase 2 of Mana in Mahi was launched in July 2019. This included additional placements, expanded eligibility criteria, an increase in pre-employment funding and the introduction of a range of additional support services.

The Expansion was implemented in August 2020 in response to COVID-19, offering expanded settings including extending the programme duration from 12 months to 24 months. In August 2022, Mana in Mahi reverted back to a one-year programme, with the same level of support maintained.

The mixed methods evaluation focused on five key evaluation questions (KEQs). These are used as headings in this findings summary.

KEQ1 What are the reasons or drivers behind the high take-up rate after the expansion of Mana in Mahi in Phase 2?

- The widened eligibility criteria of the Expansion phase meant that MSD frontline staff recommended the programme to a broader range of participants. This included people in older age groups and those who were not currently on a main benefit, but were considered at risk of long term benefit receipt.
- For employers, the wage subsidy was the most important driver of programme uptake. The subsidy gives employers the confidence to hire employees with limited or no experience, and offsets the additional costs associated with supporting their Mana in Mahi employees.
- Employees joined Mana in Mahi because they wanted to get a steady job and build a career pathway. Very few knew about the features of the programme that were intended to incentivise uptake.
- MSD frontline staff are a key conduit to programme uptake, but some staff have limited knowledge of the eligibility criteria. This may have impacted programme uptake, as the evaluation findings indicate that some people who were eligible for the programme were not offered it.

KEQ2 How do employers and employees experience Mana in Mahi programme processes?

- The structured format of the programme and its incentives creates a supportive pathway for employees to achieve sustainable employment. This includes setting out expectations for training and qualifications in contracts, and regular incentive payments.
- Employee participation in training is enhanced by clear understanding of the training requirements and drawing on the available supports. Those that didn't have awareness of what they needed to do, and the support available, were more likely to struggle in the programme and drop out early.
- Employers' retention and continued participation in the programme was strongly incentivised by the wage subsidy payments. Seeing their Mana in Mahi employee develop relevant skills and remain with the business was also a motivator to continue in the programme.
- Larger employers found Mana in Mahi programme processes easier to navigate, with smaller employers needing more support, especially those that are inexperienced in supporting trainees, and unfamiliar with subsidised employment programmes.



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KEQ3 What is the value added by the pastoral care providers to employees and employers?

- While most employees adapted to the work environment without needing additional support, some experienced challenges including relationship issues within the workplace or mental health issues. The range of pastoral care services offer mentoring, coaching, and counselling support, and are well regarded by Mana in Mahi participants who have used them.
- Despite the need for support, there is low awareness of the contracted pastoral care services amongst employers and employees. Consequently, there is low uptake of the services.
- The support services are offered at the start of employees' Mana in Mahi journey, and if the service is declined at this point there is no follow up. The uptake of the pastoral care services could be enhanced by incorporating additional proactive reach outs to employee participants at set times in the Mana in Mahi programme, such as at the three- and six-month time points.

KEQ4 To what extent did the second year of Mana in Mahi provide added value for employees and employers?

- The second year of the Mana in Mahi programme is valued by employers and employees. They considered that it contributes to employee success by offering additional time to complete the necessary training, enables them to adjust to the work environment, and provides an additional year of financial support.
- One-year programme participants in the Post-expansion phase were more likely to be incentivised by Mana in Mahi programme features, and less likely to find the training useful. This may reflect their more recent entry into the programme, and associated training, as well as wider patterns of rising unemployment after the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The evaluation did not find any statistically significant differences in retention rates between participants in the one- and two-year programmes.
- MSD's concurrent impact analysis using the Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI) will provide greater insight into the impact of the second year on participant outcomes and seek to confirm the effectiveness of the one year setting. Results will be available mid-2024.

KEQ5 To what extent are the intended outcomes of Mana in Mahi being achieved?

- The Mana in Mahi policy settings are well aligned with the intended policy outcome of supporting people into sustainable employment. Completing an NZQA-approved training pathway is a key enabler to achieving meaningful and sustainable employment. The ability to undertake part-time work, the periodic incentive payments and education support payments help employees to stay in employment and training, and therefore support the achievement of policy outcomes.
- Most employees taking part in the evaluation said that Mana in Mahi had made a big difference to their lives. Getting into work and staying employed enhanced their quality of life and their wellbeing.
- They felt that the ability to study for recognised qualifications had set them up well for the future by offering a career path, not just a job. This aligns well with the programme's intention to support people into sustainable employment.

Implications for policy and practice

Based on the evaluation findings, the evaluation has made the following suggestions for MSD to consider:

1. Retain key policy settings. The wage subsidy for employers, incentive payments for employees, ability to work part-time, and education support payments for equipment are important enablers for participants to join and remain in the programme.
2. Ensure MSD frontline staff are well informed (through training or communications) about the eligibility criteria, employer responsibilities, and pastoral care, and that they communicate this to participants. This will ensure employers and employees are given accurate information on both their obligations and the supports available.
3. Clarify where frontline and regional office staff should seek support and advice on Mana in Mahi when needed.
4. Encourage MSD frontline staff to offer additional support to small employers to enable them to navigate the administrative requirements of the programme and identify relevant training and qualifications for their employees.
5. Enhance the promotion of pastoral care support services. This may include direct promotion of Te Heke Mai to Mana in Mahi participants, and additional proactive reach outs to employee participants at set times to promote Whīiki Tauā and Puāwaitanga.
6. Consider the evaluation findings about the value of the second year alongside concurrent IDI analysis, to confirm the impact and value of the current one-year policy settings compared to the previous two-year settings.

